



# VERIS RFP Project

## Site Visit and Interview Notes

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#### General Information

##### VERIS acceptance history

The GRs were on the VERIS project team and a beta tester of the original system. The decision by this team was that VERIS should be rejected. They had to run the VVRS (old system) alongside VERIS for a year until the major issues were worked out. At one point, ELECT was doing 2 new builds a year just to keep up. Generally, the GRs find some of the approaches to election processes in VERIS counterproductive and inefficient. To improve VERIS functionality, they provided two concrete suggestions:

- Break the link with the USPS database as the address validator is fraught with errors; and,
- Improve the data between DMV and elect.

While the immediate assumption is the data from DMV is correct and accurate, the GRs have to reject approximately 20% of all DMV registrations.

##### Voter registration

They do get some voter registration applications through fax and email, but new registrants are unable to submit a new registration by fax. New registrations by email must have the scanned document attached. Digital signatures with the disclaimer on PDFs are acceptable. The GRs noted that VERIS contains data on *people* in VA, many of whom are not registered voters (e.g. mentally incapacitated, felons, non-citizens).

##### Process

Majority of registrations come through online means either through:

- DMV (online or at DMV office)
- Citizen Portal
- Third-party

The hoppers that contain the registrations that come through these methods are the DMV-OVR Hopper and Paper OVR Hopper.

The DMV experience seems to be inconsistent and error-prone. A GR noted that the DMV process they experienced at their locality involved forcing the applicant to answer “yes”—with no other option—to register to vote, regardless of whether or not they’re already registered (or want to register).

The DMV imposes a delay to check the social security number (SSN)—the GRs feel that is not DMV’s job—which can delay the submission up to 24 hours. This sometimes causes the registration to fall outside of the voter registration deadline. The GRs can see the submission time (i.e. when the voter hit “submit”) and



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the time the DMV passed along the record. The GRs have a way to capture these records and process them.

#### Paper process

The GRs receive paper applications largely through the GRs outreach staff, third-party groups, and through other GRs that naturalize new citizens. The new citizens come in by mail. Third-parties tend to drop off the applications in-person.

Nearly 90% of all their registrations are online. One of their biggest issues is the paper registrations. They've witnessed instances of fraudulent 3<sup>rd</sup> party voter registration drives. Even in the case of legitimate drives, the manual entry required for paper forms and the lack of timeliness on the part of the drive organizers causes an unneeded burden on the office. A local university had a student group that registered campus students in July and didn't turn all the paper applications into the office until October 15, the day of the deadline.

Commonwealth law requires 3<sup>rd</sup> parties to submit an alphabetical list, or log, of every voter registration application they received. A batch is every stack of voter registrations with a log and the GRs never mix batches. After receiving a batch, the GRs sort them and separate the registrations that are for other localities, which they'll note on the application and on the log (NB: these forms are mailed to their respective localities). The GRs check to make sure every registration is accounted for and note missing applications on the log. For the registrations the GRs can process, they physically type in everything on the form. Nearly every application that comes into the office is recorded into VERIS; however, if there is no signature on the form, the GRs are not required to enter it, though the GRs enter the application as a denial. The voter is sent a denial letter, either through VERIS or a non-VERIS-generated letter is sent.

#### Addresses

The address validation process in VERIS is problematic. It will sometimes misname street names. For example, "Westmoreland St.," which is one word, is constantly being renamed to "W. Moreland St."

Address standardization will sometimes flag whether the address needs an apartment number. The GRs don't necessarily need an apartment number for registration—only if the building is residential or commercial—but the system sometimes knows the type of building and requires the user to enter it.

Non-citizen data comes from the DMV, though this data is sometimes inaccurate. People read the screens too quickly or don't understand the question and hit "no" which sends the information to ELECT that the potential voter is not a citizen. If the person is already registered, the voter is sent a letter letting them know their registration will be cancelled.

Homeless voters are given residence addresses near places they typically reside. There are certain towns that have no USPS delivery, so those voters need to be able to supply a mailing address.



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#### Duplicates

Regarding duplicates, there are generally two recognized classifications:

- All information is an exact match. For these records, VERIS automatically resolves them. The GRs take no action.
- They register a person here with a certain SSN. Another county also registers another person with the same SSN. The two have to be reconciled between the two jurisdictions.

There is a report, “Duplicate SSNs,” that the GRs can run to look for SSNs throughout the state that match their voters. In addition to reaching out to their own voters, they alert the other localities with the associated duplicate SSNs to ask them to reach out to their voters. VERIS doesn’t have a form letter to send to voters with duplicate SSNs (e.g. a letter saying “please verify your SSN”).

When the system finds a duplicate for a registration being entered, the GR processing a duplicate record might miss that there are duplicates found at the bottom of the screen and process the registration.

There should be some sort of alert or intentional override that forces the processor to acknowledge they are ignoring the duplicates and processing the record.

#### Felony processing

Felony convictions are handled by the state. Mental incapacitation is handled at the locality-level. The courts provide lists of people deemed mental incapacitated which are then manually-entered into VERIS.

#### Online processing

One person submitted 52 registrations in an hour because they believed the voter registration process was instantaneous (and their online record wasn’t showing the change). The people that don’t provide all registration information to fully-complete their registration online fail to realize they have to print and mail their application. The Citizen Portal could be more explicit about this. Moreover, the Citizen Portal should prevent users from submitting incomplete registrations by making the required fields required.

#### Citizen Portal

The GRs have no influence on the Citizen Portal, but it’s the one application they receive the most complaints about. Many people find it clumsy and complain about having a horrible user experience. The entire application is only in English. The portal should ask the user if they require service in any other language other than English. There should be a drop box with, at least, three language options: “English,” “Spanish,” and “Vietnamese.”

The Citizen Portal will allow registrants to fill out an application that needs to be printed, signed, and mailed to their GR. However, the watermark on the application which reads “application completed online” confuses many voters as they see it as a confirmation that their application was accepted. The watermark should be changed to “sign and mail” for improved clarity. For the registrants that understand



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they need to print and mail incomplete applications, many of those applications arrive via US Mail and some registrants bring their application in themselves.

The Citizen Portal is great that it allows you to see voter history and track an absentee ballot application, but the application should use plain language (i.e. avoid technical elections terms). For example, it should not tell users that their application is “marked.”

The instructions for the voter registration process should clearly state that registration is not automatic and there may be a wait time before the applicant registration is processed. The GRs feel this comment should be repeated to the voter while entering data.

#### Data sources

##### ERIC

ELECT likely flags voter moves for confirmation mailings, so the GRs never see this list. The death records are inserted into the Death Hopper.

##### Wednesday packet

The contents of the Wednesday packet are:

- Incapacitated
- Paper DMV
- Paper apps
- Other state cancellations

#### Correspondence

##### External letters

The GRs largely don't use the letters in VERIS as they feel they are not complete, explicit, and/or not in the required language. Even if the GRs don't use the VERIS letters, the denial letters from VERIS are attached to the voter records. The letters that the GRs generate outside of VERIS are also scanned in and attached to the voter records. The GRs would prefer user-defined correspondence within VERIS, which would replace the form letters.

##### Date issues

If the voters come in and ask for a copy of the VERIS-generated letter, if the GRs print the file, it will stamp the file with that day's date making auditing the issue nearly impossible. The letters generated by VERIS should be kept static on the date they're originally generated.



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#### Hopper processing

##### Automatic denials

There are a few cases where the GRs can immediately deny a registration. These cases are:

- If the application is missing a signature;
- If any of the required data for a new registration is missing; or,
- If the record has an out-of-state address.

#### Absentee

##### Form design

The GRs expressed an extreme dislike for FVAP's FWAB and FPCA redesigns as the new form changes cause issues in processing the ballots and registrations due to the particulars of Commonwealth policy. For example, with FVAP removing the witness signature requirement from the FWAB, the GRs cannot fulfill the ballot request or count the ballot.

##### Denials

Approximately 100 absentee denials are processed per week. The GRs don't receive many out-of-state voter registration forms, but they do receive quite a number of out-of-state absentee ballot request forms (e.g. a voter will send a Massachusetts absentee request form to the GRs).

##### Pending absentee requests

When an absentee ballot request is pending, it means there is an unprocessed/incomplete voter registration that has to be processed, first. The status of the OAB application isn't visible in the hopper making it difficult to deal with in the workflow of large offices where a single person may be dedicated to processing absentee ballot applications.

Ideally, all pending OAB applications would be placed into a "DMV-OAB Pending Applications" hopper and would be released into the "DMV-OAB Applications" hopper once the voter registration has been processed. In addition, the OAB application date should change to the voter registration processed date. This is crucial for larger offices where employees have clear separation of duties.

##### Federal write-in absentee ballot (FWAB)

The FWAB presents a number of unique challenges. The FWAB is only accepted as an official ballot if the state ballot never arrives. The GRs process 700 to 1000 FWABs per election. FVAP removed the witness signature line on the FWAB, which has been a serious issue for the Commonwealth and has resulted in more FWABs being rejected. Since the FWAB can double as both a ballot and a voter registration—a policy that the GRs find extremely problematic—the FWAB kicks out the existing FPCA in VERIS. When this



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happens, the GRs have to manually re-enter the FPCA, resulting in a significant amount of additional work. FWABs should have their own application line within applications and ballot line listed under ballot.

#### Citizen Portal

If a voter is viewing their voter record and they attempt to update their registration or request an absentee ballot, the system will allow them to apply for a ballot for a far-future election or an election for which they are ineligible due to the election taking place outside their locality, which the GR will have to deny.

If a voter updates their registration—even if no information changes—and then applies for an absentee ballot, it can put them into a pending OAB state since VERIS generates an online registration and an absentee ballot request.

#### In-person

Even with a substantial voter base, it's important to note that the GRs receive very few walk-in registrations or absentee voters.

#### Security

##### Locality IT

The GRs see their locality IT restrictions as more stringent than the state. Google Drive is completely banned by locality IT because they see it as a window into the network.

#### Training

The sandbox—the VERIS training environment—is being wiped every 2 weeks, which is frustrating to GRs that have directly loaded data for training purposes. In addition, there are version conflicts between the user acceptance testing (UAT) environment, the sandbox, and production. Oddly, the GRs noted that the sandbox is more closely aligned with production than UAT. They mentioned that ELECT has told the GRs that there are things they can do in the sandbox that they are unable to do on UAT.

#### Miscellaneous

##### Language support

Technically, providing materials in Korean may be against state law (since it's not obligated by federal law). The GRs noted that Virginia is a Dylan Rule state (i.e. "if it's not permitted, it's forbidden").



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#### Updates to the system

The Technical Advisories sent through the liaisons cover anything that may be technical in nature, which would include VERIS updates. While they note that the communication from ELECT is better than it used to be, it doesn't help that the GRs know that a feature will be going into VERIS—and then deployed— without having tested or provided feedback on the feature.

#### VERIS sandbox

The GRs would like their own sandbox that ELECT does not regularly wipe or interact with in any way. Currently, ELECT uses the sandbox—which is supposed to be for training—for testing because it is more up to date than their actual testing sandbox. The GRs' ideal would be each locality having a sandbox.

#### Reporting

The current reporting features are inadequate and inefficient. User-defined reports and searches are essential to any new system.

#### Citizen Portal updates

The Citizen Portal used to have a useful feature called “what is on your ballot.” This was extremely helpful for voters and the GRs believe it should be brought back.

Through the Citizen Portal, a voter should be able to request a duplicate voter registration card.

More plain language should be used throughout the application. For instance, in the voting history, “marked” would be translated to “received” and “unmarked” would be “undeliverable or returned by voter.”